been initiated. Eight States have been covered so far. These include Karnataka, West Bengal, Uttaranchal, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Arunachal Pradesh and Rajasthan. Each visit is concluded with a Statement of conclusions jointly signed with the Chief Minister of the State concerned, laying out the points of action on which the State would move to operationalise the recommendations of the Round Tables.

An exercise is underway to review different statutes with a view to harmonise them with the provisions of Part IX of the Constitution. Similarly, the guidelines of Centrally Sponsored Schemes are being reviewed to ensure the centrality of Panchayats in planning and implementation. As regards new Centrally Sponsored Schemes, wherever relevant, it is proposed to provide for a central role for Panchayats. Thus, for example, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act provides for the Panchayats to be the "principal authorities" for the planning and implementation of schemes under the Act. Steps are also being taken to fill in critical gaps in infrastructure and capacity so that Panchayats can effectively fulfill their constitutional role.

Establishment of two out of three tier Panchayat system

2213. SHRI SHANTARAM LAXMAN NAIK: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is a demand from certain smaller States for a Constitutional amendment to permit them the option of establishing any two out of three tier Panchayat system instead of the present mandatory Constitutional provision which gives option to the States only as regards the middle tier;

(b) if so, the names of the States who have formally or informally demanded for the amendment; and

(c) the reaction of Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) to (c) No, Sir. The Constitution (Article 243B) provides for a two tier system (district and village level) in States having a population not exceeding 20 lakhs. There is no recent demand from any of the

"smaller States" for such an amendment, though a proposal had earlier been under consideration to amend some parts of the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992. Having considered all aspects of the matter, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj has decided to facilitate and secure implementation of the Constitution Seventy third Amendment) Act, 1992 by States/UTs in letter and spirit, by encouraging them to adopt carefully drawn up plans of action to implement the existing provisions of the Constitution.

Joint ventures with China

2214. DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY:
PROF. ALKA BALRAM KSHATRIYA:

Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Indian Joint Task Force visited China during month of August, 2005 and found strong support from Chinese state-run firms and Government to forge a Joint participation for assets in third countries;

(b) whether China has taken edge when it comes to bidding as it snaps deal at any cost;

(c) if so, whether by co-operation of both China and Indian companies, both Governments could get contracts from foreign countries; and

(d) if so, to what extent joint participation so far have been agreed upon and what are counties where there joint participation will take place?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) to (d) Yes, Sir. An Indian Joint Task Force led by Additional Secretary (International Cooperation), Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas visited China between August 9—13, 2005 and held discussions with senior officials of the National Development and Reforms Commission, the National Energy Leading Group and representatives of China's three principal petroleum companies. In these meetings, the Task Force was informed that there was need for Indian and Chinese companies to cooperate with each other since they had good bilateral relations and mutual trust, which provides a sound basis